

# How Should Social Media Content Surveillance Be Used as a Research Tool?

Alan S. Levy  
Senior Scientist  
Consumer Studies, DSS/ORPSS/CFSAN

# Background

- FDA has asked for bids on a contract to do content surveillance of social media sites, including blogs, wikis, forums, news sites with embedded comment features, microblogs, chats, podcasting, video, file sharing and bookmarking.
- Such formats offer news and discussions with “read and write” capability such that large numbers of internet users can reflect on, learn from and add to the virtual conversation.

# Purpose

- By actively “listening” to conversations, an organization can assess how its audience/customers are responding to products and messages, albeit with limitations related to the self-selection of participants.
- FDA proposes to use this capability to assess responses to outbreaks/recalls and related messaging, particularly social media outreach.

# How It Works

- Commercial services provide real-time capabilities to monitor and analyze website conversations using keywords, sentiment indicators, text analytics to identify relevant topics, and other data mining techniques.
- Content can be tracked daily or even hourly, broken out by site category.
- Information flows through the social media space can be identified in terms of cited links.

# Possible Questions

- What advice can you give about the range of relevant topics that should be tracked for a given outbreak event?
- How would you characterize the different phases of an unfolding outbreak/recall event that might last over several months?
- How would we validate the findings of the data mining analyses against those of surveys?